

Waterways: The Headwaters of a Continent

The Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) is the headwaters to several of America's most prominent rivers including the Missouri, Yellowstone, Snake, and Green. Waters of the GYA are renowned for their excellent fishing in superlative settings. Legendary rivers such as the Henrys Fork, Firehole, Madison, Yellowstone, and Snake attract anglers from around the world. Not only are these headwaters important for fish, wildlife, and recreation in the upper reaches, communities downstream depend upon the clean and abundant flows for domestic, agricultural, and industrial use. Water may very well be the most valuable resource from federal lands in the GYA. A vital function of GYCC units is to ensure the integrity of these important waters at their source.

Federal agencies in the GYA manage large amounts of public land to protect water quality and aquatic ecosystems. This management is directed and guided by numerous laws, rules, regulations, and policies. One guiding document of recent significance is the *Unified Federal Policy for a Watershed Approach to Federal Land and Resource Management*, published in the Federal Register October 18, 2000. This policy is one outcome of the *Clean Water Action Plan: Restoring and Protecting America's Waters*, which was released in 1998 to "provide a blueprint for restoring and protecting the nation's precious water resources."

The Unified Federal Policy provides a framework for a watershed approach to federal land and resource management activities by:

- using a consistent and scientific approach to manage federal lands and resources and to assess, protect, and restore watersheds;
- identifying specific watersheds in which to focus funding and personnel for accelerating improvements in water quality, aquatic habitat, and watershed conditions;
- using the results of watershed assessments to guide planning and management activities in accordance with applicable authorities and procedures;
- working closely with states, tribes, local governments, private landowners, and stakeholders to implement this policy;
- meeting Clean Water Act responsibility to comply with applicable federal, state, tribal, interstate, and local water quality requirements to the same extent as non-governmental entities; and
- taking steps to ensure that federal land and resource management actions are consistent with applicable federal, state, tribal, and local government water quality management programs.

The Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee developed a watershed management strategy for the GYA. The strategy is consistent with the U.S. Forest Service Natural Resource Agenda and National Park Service Natural Resource Challenge, as well as strategic plans recently developed by both agencies in response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). The strategy utilizes information available from the Inland West Water Initiative, which is described below.

Inland West Water Initiative

National forests in the interior west states of Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and South Dakota completed a project called the *Inland West Water Initiative*. The project was created as a proactive strategic step to protect vital water related resources on national forest lands. A primary initial task was completion of a rapid watershed reconnaissance that, through the use of existing information, resulted in a database that identifies the:

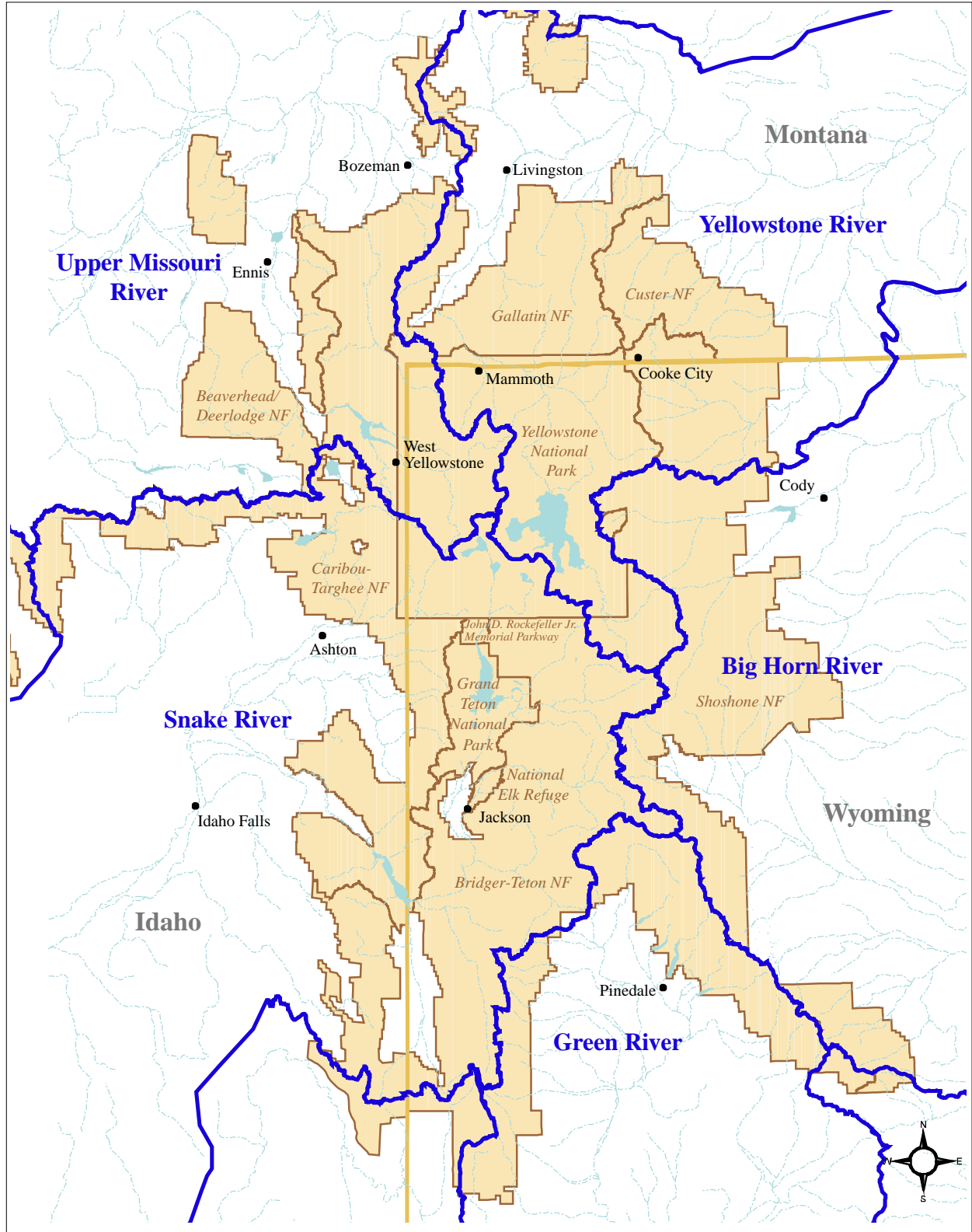
- watershed vulnerability (inherent risk of conducting activities within a watershed),
- crucial stream segments (locations of critical water-dependent resource values at risk that need priority protection),
- damaged stream segments (locations of damaged soil, riparian and aquatic resource values that need to be restored), and
- geomorphic integrity and water quality integrity, respectively (probable condition of watersheds and aquatic systems at a consistent scale of resolution).

This initial task was completed in the late 1990s. In 2000, national forest staff in the GYA worked cooperatively with staff from Yellowstone National Park to produce comparable information for the park. Similar efforts are presently being pursued by the committee for Grand Teton National Park and the National Elk Refuge, Red Rock Lakes Refuge, and Greys Lake Refuge.

The assessment, based on existing data, will be useful for developing watershed restoration priorities, for project and land use planning at the unit level, and for identifying cooperative watershed management opportunities. Additional recommendations include development of a comprehensive, GYA-wide inventory of abandoned mines and contaminated sites, along with a strategy to work with states and others to reclaim these sites.

For additional information go to www.cleanwater.gov.

The Greater Yellowstone Area: Major Watersheds



	Administrative Boundaries	NF	National Forest
	Major Lakes	NP	National Park
	Major Towns		State Boundaries

Approximate Scale 1:2,000,000
 20 0 20 Miles

This map was made from Greater Yellowstone Data provided by the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee. Map by W. Urie, February 7, 2000. Version 1.1, wsiwwi/huc3and4.apr gyawatersheds.eps

